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C O N F I D E N T I A L CHIANG MAI 000060

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SUBJECT: ATTACK ON DEMOCRAT PARTY RALLY IN CHIANG MAI ESCALATES  
VIOLENCE

REF: CHIANG MAI 41

CLASSIFIED BY: Bea Camp, Consul General, Chiang Mai, State.  
REASON: 1.4 (d)

¶1. (U) Summary: An attempted Democrat Party foray into Chiang Mai - known to all as Thaksin territory -- ended in chaos Thursday as pro-Thaksin supporters blocked roads and disrupted the party's rally at Chiang Mai University. Driven off the stage after only five minutes, Democrat Party leaders abruptly called an end to the rally and rushed back to Bangkok. End summary

¶2. (U) Democrat party leaders came to Chiang Mai March 30 for one of several regional rallies to explain the party position on the elections. The Democrat's northern gathering was scheduled on the campus of Chiang Mai University (CMU), where a small band of NGO and political activists have been gathering nightly to watch live broadcasts of the demonstrations in Bangkok. This anti-Thaksin group, while prudently restricting itself to the relative safety of campus, has reported previous intimidation by Thaksin supporters shouting and gunning engines when passing the gathering.

¶3. (C ) Consensus suspicion immediately settled on Thai Rak Thai (TRT) MP Pakorn Buranupakorn as the man who organized the aggressive attack on the Democrat rally. Pakorn, former Chiang Mai mayor, brother of the current mayor, and secretary to the Minister of Justice, reportedly wanted to revenge Thaksin's humiliation earlier in the week when a group of women, including one identified as a Democrat party member, drove him away from a popular lunchtime shopping street in Bangkok. Pakorn was earlier said to be the financier of anonymous banners proclaiming northerners' love for Thaksin that appeared in Chiang Mai in mid-February (ref a).

¶4. ( C ) According to Thai News columnist Bunyarit Tulapanpong, the pro-Thaksin crowd received Baht 200 per person while the pickup drivers got Baht 1,000 per car. The protest was clearly organized, not spontaneous, with placards, effigies of the four opposition leaders, and a sound equipment-light truck.

¶5. (SBU) The action started in late afternoon on Thursday when pro-Thaksin protestors blockaded the road in front of the CMU Art Museum, site of the Democrat rally. The Democrats reportedly requested, but did not get, additional police protection at the rally site. Another group that went to the airport to intercept the arriving Democrat leaders stormed into the airport terminal, ignoring security machines and guards and forcing the arriving Democrats to exit a back door.

¶6. (U) By 6:30 pm, some thousand protestors blocked the Nimmanahaeminda road and main gates to the CMU Art Museum grounds. The protestors shouted abuse, cranked up loudspeakers, burned effigies, and threw eggs, plastic water bottles, placards

on poles and plastic chairs at those on the stage. Outnumbered police were unable to control the situation as more and more protesters got inside the seating area and approached the stage.

The besieged Democrats called it quits at about 7 pm, only minutes after party leader Abhisit Vejjajiva had begun addressing the small audience of no more than 100 who had managed to reach the area. As TV viewers saw later that evening, Abhisit, party advisor Chuan Leekpai, deputy party leader Dr Trairong Suwankiri and Thoedpong Chaiyanand, former Phetburi MP Alongkorn Polabut and former Tak MP Chaiwut Bannawat, were rushed into cars and away from the scene to the airport. Chanting victory, the protestors later received dinner boxes from a pickup truck, with some continuing on to rally at Thaphae Gate before dispersing.

17. ( C ) When questioned about the incident by the Consul General on Friday morning, the municipal government's highest ranking civil servant initially professed confusion. Asked whether any official would take action against the illegal road closings and the violence, he dismissed the question as unlikely and the incident as the work of "a mob". However, Chiang Mai Governor Suwat Tantipat and Police Chief Major General Jirut Prommobon reportedly received reprimands for the violence from Bangkok, according to a source at Government House.

18. ( C ) Comment: Chiang Mai's relatively invisible Thaksin opposition has been the target of previous intimidation by the city's pro-TRT political rulers, including a live grenade found at the restaurant of well-known singer and Thaksin opponent Soontharee Wecharnon last weekend. The unprecedented level of hooliganism and violence in Thursday's attack shocked many people, however, who believe it could do more to radicalize people than anything the Democrats might have said at the rally.

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